Cuba mourns 32 troops killed in US attack

HAVANA: Cuba received on Thursday the remains of its 32 soldiers killed in combat during the US attack on Venezuela and stunning capture of its president, Nicolas Maduro, paying homage to the troops as national "heroes."

The remains of the soldiers, members of Cuba's armed forces and intelligence agencies, arrived early on Thursday at Havana's international airport, in caskets draped in the Cuban flag.

Cuba has provided some security for Maduro since he came to power. It was not clear how many of the fallen Cubans were guarding the Venezuelan president when they died, or how many may have perished elsewhere.

The communist government of Cuba earlier this month said 32 of its citizens had died during the U.S. raid on the Venezuelan capital Caracas. A military band in white uniforms played the Cuban national anthem on the tarmac during a ceremony overseen by President Miguel Diaz-Canel, 94-year-old former leader Raul Castro and top military officials.

General Lazaro Alberto Alvarez said the fallen troops represented Cuba's unwavering commitment to its homeland and allies.

"If this painful chapter of history has demonstrated anything, it is that imperialism may possess the most sophisticated weapons, may impose immense material wealth, may buy the minds of the wavering, but there is one thing it will never be able to buy: the dignity of the Cuban people," he said.

A motorcade later transferred the bodies to the armed forces ministry along one of the capital's main boulevards, lined by thousands paying their respects, waving flags and saluting.

Maduro, 63, and his wife Cilia Flores were seized by US forces in Caracas on Jan 3 and flown to the United States. Maduro is being held in a New York detention center on drug charges.—Reuters

CUBAN military personnel salute caskets during a remembrance in Havana for the 32 soldiers who died during the US incursion to capture Venezuelan leader Nicolas Maduro.—AFP

Bodies of 21 migrants found in Libyan grave

TRIPOLI: At least 21 bodies of migrants have been found in a mass grave in eastern Libya, with up to 10 survivors in the group bearing signs of having been tortured before they were freed from captivity, two security sources said on Thursday.

The sources said security authorities raided a farm near the town of Ajdabiya after receiving a report of migrants from sub-Saharan Africa being held there.

"We found migrants — men, women and children — bearing signs of torture. They were taken to a hospital where they reported that other migrants had been with them and then disappeared," one of the security sources said.

The mass grave was discovered some 10 km (six miles) southeast of Ajdabiya, which is around 160 km from Benghazi, the second largest city in the North African country.

The farm owner was arrested and had admitted the presence of a mass grave on his property, the sources said.

Unverified pictures posted on the internet showed a number of security personnel and Red Crescent volunteers placing bodies allegedly found on the farm property into black plastic bags.—Agencies

Europeans rush soldiers to Greenland amid Trump claim

NUUK: European countries sent small numbers of military personnel to Greenland on Thursday as Denmark said it was pressing on with plans for a "larger and more permanent" Nato presence to secure the island coveted by US President Donald Trump.

The modest European deployments, meant to help Denmark prepare military exercises, sent a strong message of support a day after a meeting of officials from the US, Denmark and Greenland failed to reach any break-through on the impasse.

After that meeting, Trump repeated his assertion that Denmark could not be relied upon to protect its autonomous territory, Greenland, if Russia or China ever wanted to occupy it.

Trump says the strategically located and mineral-rich island is vital to US security and has not ruled out the use of force to take it. Greenland and Denmark say it is not for sale and that threats of force are reckless.

On Thursday, Denmark's defence minister, Troels Lund Poulsen, told journalists in Copenhagen he did not have a final figure for the envisaged expanded Nato presence in Greenland. "But it is clear that we now will be able to plan for a larger and more permanent presence throughout 2026 and that is crucial to show that security in the Arctic is not only for the Kingdom of Denmark it is for all of Nato."

Nato future

Prominent EU countries have backed Denmark, warning that a US military seizure of Greenland could spell the end of Nato. Before Wednesday's meeting in the US, Greenland and Denmark said they had begun to increase their military presence in and around Greenland in cooperation with Nato allies.

Denmark had about 150 military and civilian personnel working at its Joint Arctic Command on the island.

Germany, France, Sweden, Norway, Finland and the Netherlands have said they are sending military staff to begin preparations for larger drills later this year.

In Nuuk, business owner Mads Petersen said it would be strange to see more military troops. "I don't hope it is the new normal," he said.

Kremlin rejects Nato talk

Russia said on Thursday Nato's talk of Moscow and Beijing being a threat to Greenland was a myth designed to whip up hysteria and warned of the dangers of escalating confrontation in the region. Still, any attempt to ignore Russia's interests in the Arctic would not go unanswered, a foreign ministry spokeswoman later said.

There is currently little evidence that a large number of Chinese and Russian ships sail near Greenland's coasts.

Part of Danish territory "has been included in Washington's arbitrarily defined sphere of US interests," Russian foreign ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said.

"Against this backdrop, the myth of some kind of Russian threat, rigorously promoted by Denmark and other members of the European Union and NATO for many years, is especially hypocritical." Both Nato and Russia have bulked up their military presence in the Arctic in recent years, as melting sea ice opens the region up to international shipping and mining activities.

Foreign troops

Danish Foreign Minister Lars Lokke Rasmussen said on Wednesday about 200 U.S. troops were currently stationed in Greenland, which has a population of around 57,000. The scale of the planned European military build-up has not been made public, but initial deployments appear small.

The German Armed Forces were deploying a reconnaissance team of 13, first to Copenhagen, before heading on to Greenland with Danish personnel. Late on Wednesday, a Danish Air Force plane landed at Nuuk airport and personnel in military fatigues disembarked.—Agencies

Global cooperation on 'deathwatch', UN chief says

UNITED NATIONS: UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres lashed out on Thursday at world leaders who he said were seeking to "put international cooperation on deathwatch" amid brazen violations of international law, but held off naming offending countries.

He also reiterated that he was "deeply concerned about the violent repression in Iran," ahead of an emergency Security Council meeting on the crisis scheduled for later Thursday.

Guterres, who will step down at the end of 2026, was giving his last annual speech setting out his priorities for the year ahead and said the world was riven with "self-defeating geopolitical divides (and) brazen violations of international law." He also slammed "wholesale cuts in development and humanitarian aid" — an apparent reference to deep cuts to the budgets of UN agencies made by the United States under the Trump administration's "America First" policies.

"These forces and more are shaking the foundations of global cooperation and testing the resilience of multilateralism itself," Guterres told the General Assembly.

"At a time when we need international cooperation the most, we seem to be the least inclined to use it and invest in it. Some seek to put international cooperation on deathwatch." Guterres said the UN is "totally committed in the cause of peace in Gaza, Ukraine, Sudan and far beyond and tireless in delivering life-saving aid to those so desperate for support." Those three deadly, protracted conflicts have come to define Guterres's time at the helm of the UN, with critics arguing the organisation has proved ineffective at conflict prevention.—AFP

Two die in Thailand after another crane collapses

BANGKOK: A crane collapsed onto a road near Thailand's capital on Thursday, crushing two vehicles and killing two people a day after a similar accident in the north-east caused the derailing of a train and the deaths of 32 passengers.

Thailand's transport minister said construction firm Italian-Thai Development PCL, whose crane fell onto the train in north-eastern Nakhon Ratchasima province a day earlier, was also involved in the crane accident near Bangkok.

Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul , who faces a general election next month, said on Thursday that his government is moving to cancel two contracts with ITD involving the two accident-hit projects, and vowed legal action against the firm.

"The Ministry of Transport has been instructed to terminate the contracts with the contractors, pursue all legal action available, and place them on a blacklist," he told reporters.

The government has also ordered a pause to around a dozen active ITD construction projects involving the state and put them under review, transport minister Phiphat Ratchakitprakarn said.

Italian-Thai, founded in 1958 by Italian and Thai partners, said in a statement shortly after the prime minister's remarks that it accepts responsibility for providing care, compensation, and remedies for the losses incurred in both incidents.—Reuters

Trump threatens to invoke Insurrection Act over Minnesota protests

Another shooting fuels chaos in Minneapolis

MINNEAPOLIS: US President Donald Trump on Thursday threatened to invoke an emergency law that allows domestic deployment of the military, as protests roil Minnesota after a federal agent shot dead a woman last week.

Tensions rose further overnight and more protests broke out as another person was shot and wounded by a federal agent in the frigid northern city that is a Democratic stronghold.

Trump reacted on his social media platform Truth Social with his latest threat to invoke the Insurrection Act, a 19th century law that allows the president to deploy soldiers for law enforcement purposes to put down unrest deemed to be an insurrection. It has not been used in more than 30 years.

In recent months Trump has threatened several times to use the law as he reacted angrily to protests and court decisions blocking his drive to deploy the National Guard in his muscled crackdown on illegal immigration. But so far he has stopped short of resorting to the law as he presses an agenda that has drawn accusations of authoritarian overreach and periodic mass rallies with the mantra "No Kings."

"If the corrupt politicians of Minnesota don't obey the law and stop the professional agitators and insurrectionists from attacking the Patriots of ICE, who are only trying to do their job, I will institute the INSURRECTION ACT...and quickly put an end to the travesty that is taking place in that once great State," Trump posted on social media.

Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem, addressing reporters outside the White House, declined to say if she thinks Trump should invoke the law. "I think that the President has that opportunity in the future. It's his constitutional right, and it's up to him if he wants to utilise it to do it," Noem said. Asked if Trump is likely to take this major step, she said "I don't know." Tensions rose further as an immigration agent shot and injured a man, triggering further protests.

The shooting marked the second time in a week an ICE agent had shot someone in Minneapolis. The previous shooting resulted in the death of 37-year-old Renee Nicole Good on January 7. This sparked ongoing protests and a surge of federal agents into the northern US city.

Minneapolis Police Chief Brian O'Hara said the shooting on Wednesday resulted from a struggle between an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agent and a man he was trying to apprehend.

"During the struggle, the federal agent discharged his weapon, striking one adult male," O'Hara told reporters at a press conference.

Amid the tussle, two people emerged from a nearby residence and attacked the federal agent with a snow shovel and a broom handle, the Department of Homeland Security said, identifying the wounded man as an illegal immigrant from Venezuela.

The man suffered a non-life-threatening gunshot wound to his leg and was transported to a hospital for treatment, while the two others were taken into custody, officials said.

The Insurrection Act was last invoked in 1992 by President George H.W. Bush at the request of the Republican governor of California, who was facing unprecedented riots in Los Angeles following the acquittal of police officers who had beaten Rodney King, a Black motorist, the previous year.—AFP

NEWSMAKERS

BERLIN: Tricia Tuttle, director of the Berlinale, holds a Berlin Bear award statuette during a media tour, ahead of the International Film Festival.—Reuters

SUPPORT teams onboard a recovery ship work around the SpaceX Dragon Endeavour spacecraft shortly after it landed in the Pacific Ocean off the coast of Long Beach, California.—AFP

KYIV(Ukraine)**:** A woman feeds two blue tits at a snow-covered park.—AFP

AHMEDABAD (India): A veterinarian treats a painted stork at a hospital after it was injured by a kite string during a festival.—Reuters

SpaceX capsule with four astronauts splashes down safely off California

LOS ANGELES: A SpaceX capsule carrying a four-member crew home from orbit in an emergency return to earth necessitated by an undisclosed serious medical condition afflicting one of the astronauts splashed down safely early on Wednesday in the Pacific Ocean off California.

The Crew Dragon capsule dubbed Endeavour parachuted into calm seas off San Diego at about 12:45am, capping a 10-hour-plus descent from the International Space Station and fiery re-entry through Earth's atmosphere.

Their return a few weeks ahead of schedule marked the first time that Nasa has cut short the mission of an ISS crew due to a health emergency.

Live infrared video presented in a joint Nasa-SpaceX webcast showed deployment of the two sets of parachutes from the nose of the free-falling capsule, slowing its rate of descent to about 15 miles per hour (25 kph) before it gently hit the water.

Moments later, several dolphins were visible swimming near the capsule, their dorsal fins breaking the surface of the ocean, as the spacecraft bobbed gently upright in the water.

In a radio transmission to the SpaceX flight-control center near Los Angeles, Endeavour's commander, Nasa astronaut Zena Cardman, 38, was heard saying, "It's good to be home." Joining her on the flight home were fellow US astronaut Mike Fincke, 58, Japanese astronaut Kimiya Yui, 55, and Russian cosmonaut Oleg Platonov, 39.

They arrived together at the space station following a launch to orbit from Florida in August, and departed Wednesday afternoon on a 10 1/2-hour flight home, ending a 167-day mission.—Reuters

WHITCHURCH (UK): Construction crew work to retrieve a boat stranded on the bed of the Llangollen Canal.—AFP